



Vitamin K

Why Do Newborns Need a Vitamin K Shot?

I'm pregnant with my first child, and my OB told me that my baby will get a shot of vitamin K right away. Is this really necessary?

Yes, health experts recommend that all newborns get a dose of vitamin K at birth. Babies aren't born with enough of this important vitamin, which is needed for blood to clot normally.

Babies who don't get vitamin K at birth are at risk for a potentially fatal bleeding disorder called **vitamin K deficient bleeding (VKDB)**. VKDB can cause bruising or bleeding in nearly every organ of the body. Almost half of VKDB cases involve bleeding in the brain and brain damage.

Babies are at risk for VKDB for the first 6 months of life. That's because most of the vitamin K the body makes comes from the foods we eat and the healthy bacteria in our intestines. Until they start eating solid food at about 6 months of age, babies don't have enough naturally produced vitamin K. And nursing moms don't pass enough vitamin K in their breast milk to protect their babies from VKDB.

Why, then, do some parents delay or refuse their newborn's vitamin K injection? A study in the early 1990s suggested a link between the vitamin K shot and childhood cancer. Many studies since then have found **no connection** between vitamin K and cancer. But that misinformation is still readily available online. As a result, some families are delaying or skipping the shot, or looking for other ways for their infants to receive vitamin K.

Some European countries let families choose an oral form of vitamin K. But this is far less effective than the shot at preventing bleeding, especially in the brain. Oral vitamin K is not available for newborns in the United States.

No parent enjoys the thought of their little one getting a shot. But a single injection of vitamin K can protect a baby from a serious, even deadly preventable bleeding disorder. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has more info about the vitamin K injection and VKDB.

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